

8th International Congress Marketing Trends
Paris, January 16-17 2009

Consumption Experiences and the Quest for Authenticity, between “Drama” and “Theatre”

Donata Collodi, Francesco Crisci, Andrea Moretti
University of Udine - IT



Agenda

- **Research objectives**
 - authenticity and consumption experiences: “is a fake a sign?”
- **Method**
 - “authentication as a clear case of semiotic interpretation or of *abduction*”;
- **Theoretical foundations**
 - a semiotic framework to fakes: “the fake as a fake sign”;
- **Results/Findings**
 - a semiotic approach to fakes – objects, documents, work of art, experiences – shows us how theoretically weak are our criteria for deciding about authenticity;
- **Discussion**
 - a “powerful” analogy: consumption experiences as “drama and theatre” – together!



Research objectives

- to introduce the study of “consumption experiences” as a “text” (Hirschman & Holbrook 1992; Holbrook, Hirschman 1993);
- to introduce Eco’s semiotic framework to the concept of authenticity (Eco 1990);
 - to present a topology of false identification as an interesting approach to fakes;
 - to identify “satisfactory” criteria for proving authenticity and for falsifying false identifications as a “cultural process”;
- to analyse consumption experiences as a “cultural discourse” (Consumer Culture Theory approach) based on the analogy between mimesis/imitation and consumption experience (Arnould, Thompson 2005):
 - consumption experience as “theatre&drama”: “CCT’s perspective” vs. “Gilmore&Pine 2007’s concept of authenticity”)

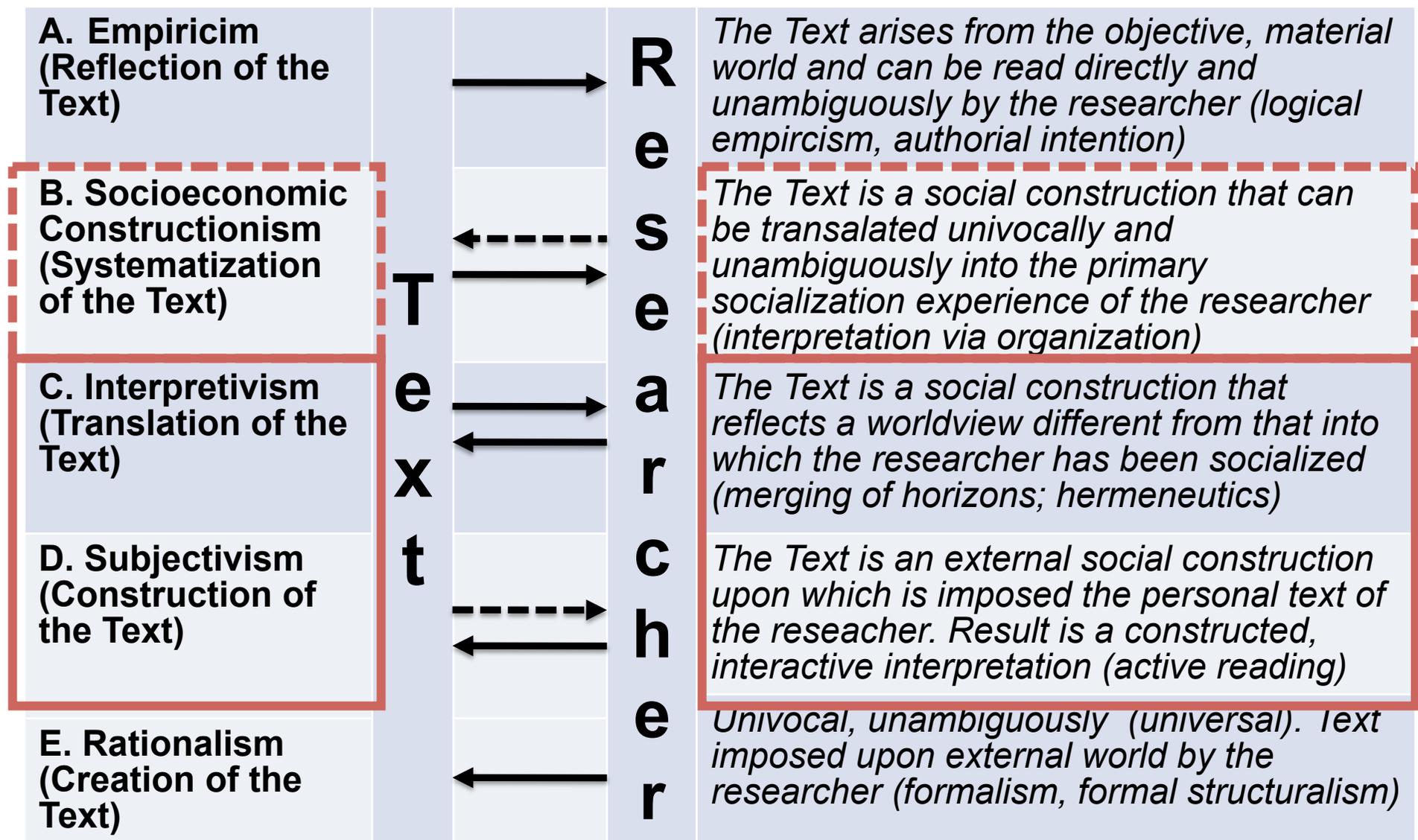


Agenda

- Research objectives (authenticity and consumption experiences: “is a fake a sign?”)
- Method (“authentication as a clear case of semiotic interpretation or of *abduction*”);
- Theoretical foundations (a semiotic framework to fakes: “the fake as a fake sign”);
- Results/Findings (a semiotic approach to fakes – objects, documents, work of art, experiences – shows us how theoretically weak are our criteria for deciding about authenticity);
- Discussion (a “powerful” analogy: consumption experiences as “drama and theatre” – together!)



Method (1): different models of *interpretation* (Philosophical assumptions)





Method (2): Logic of Abduction

- The validity of interpretive semiology approach to using consumption symbolism and marketing imagery as guides in the interpretation of cultural products rests on what Charles Peirce called *abductive inference* or logic of *abduction* (Mick 1986; Holbrook, Hirschman 1993);

Deduction		Induction		Abduction	
Rule:	All the beans from this bag are white	Case:	These beans are from this bag	Rule:	All the beans from this bag are white
Case:	These beans are from this bag	Result:	These beans are white	Result:	These beans are white
Result:	These beans are white	Rule:	All the beans from this bag are white	Case:	These beans are from this bag



Method (3a): A Strange Story...

Rule → Result → Case

- In 1921, Picasso asserts that he has painted a portrait of Honorio Bustos Domeq. Fernando Pessoa writes that he has seen the portrait and praises it as the greatest masterpiece ever produced by Picasso. Many critics look for the portrait but Picasso says that it has been stolen.
- In 1945, Salvador Dalì announces that he has rediscovered this portrait in Perpignan. Picasso formally recognizes the portrait as his original work. The painting is sold to the Museum of Modern Art, under the title “Pablo Picasso: *Portrait of Bustos Domeq, 1921*”.
- In 1950, Jorge Luis Borges writes an essay (“El Omega de Pablo”) in which he maintains that:



Method (3b): A Strange Story...

Rule → Result → Case

- 1. Picasso and Pessoa lied because nobody in 1921 painted a portrait of Domeq.**
- 2. In any case, no Domeq could have been portrayed in 1921 because such a character was invented by Borges and Bioy Casares during the 1940s.**
- 3. Picasso actually painted the portrait in 1945 and falsely dated it 1921.**
- 4. Dalì stole the portrait and copied it (masterfully). Immediately afterward, he destroyed the original.**
- 5. Obviously, the 1945 Picasso was perfectly imitating the style of the early Picasso and Dalì's copy was indistinguishable from the original. Both Picasso and Dalì used canvas and colors produced in 1921.**
- 6. Therefore, the work exposed in NY is the deliberate authorial forgery of a deliberate forgery of a historical forgery (which mendaciously portrayed a nonexistent person).**



Method (3c): A Strange Story...

Rule → Result → Case

- In 1986, there is found an unpublished text of Raymond Queneau, asserting that:
 - Bustos Domeq really existed, except that his real name was Schmidt. Alice Toklas in 1921 maliciously introduced him to Braque as Domeq, and Braque portrayed him under this name (in good faith), imitating the style of Picasso (in bad faith).
 - Domeq-Schmidt died during the saturation bombing of Dresden, and all his identity papers were destroyed in those circumstances.
 - Dalì really rediscovered the portrait in 1945 and copied it. Later, he destroyed the original. A week later, Picasso made a copy of Dalì's copy; then the copy by Dalì was destroyed. The portrait sold to the MOMA is a fake painted by Picasso imitating a fake painted by Dalì imitating a fake painted by Braque.
 - He (Queneau) has learned all this from the discoverer of Hitler's diaries



Agenda

- Research objectives (authenticity and consumption experiences: “is a fake a sign?”)
- Method (“authentication as a clear case of semiotic interpretation or of *abduction*”);
- Theoretical foundations (a semiotic framework to fakes: “the fake as a fake sign”);
- Results/Findings (a semiotic approach to fakes – objects, documents, work of art, experiences – shows us how theoretically weak are our criteria for deciding about authenticity);
- Discussion (a “powerful” analogy: consumption experiences as “drama and theatre” – together!)



Theoretical foundations (1)

- **It is evident that:**
 - **all the individuals in the story are by now dead. The only object we have at our disposal is that hanging in the MOMA;**
 - **there is no painting at the MOMA under the title “Pablo Picasso: *Portrait of Bustos Domeq*, 1921”;**
 - **the story was invented by Umberto Eco.**
- **Replicability of objects (Eco 1990):**
 - **«Fakes, forgeries, and the like concern cases in which either: (i) there is a physical object that, because of its similarity with some other objects, can be mistaken for it; (ii) or a given object is falsely attributed to an author who is said to have made-or supposed to have been able make-similar objects»**

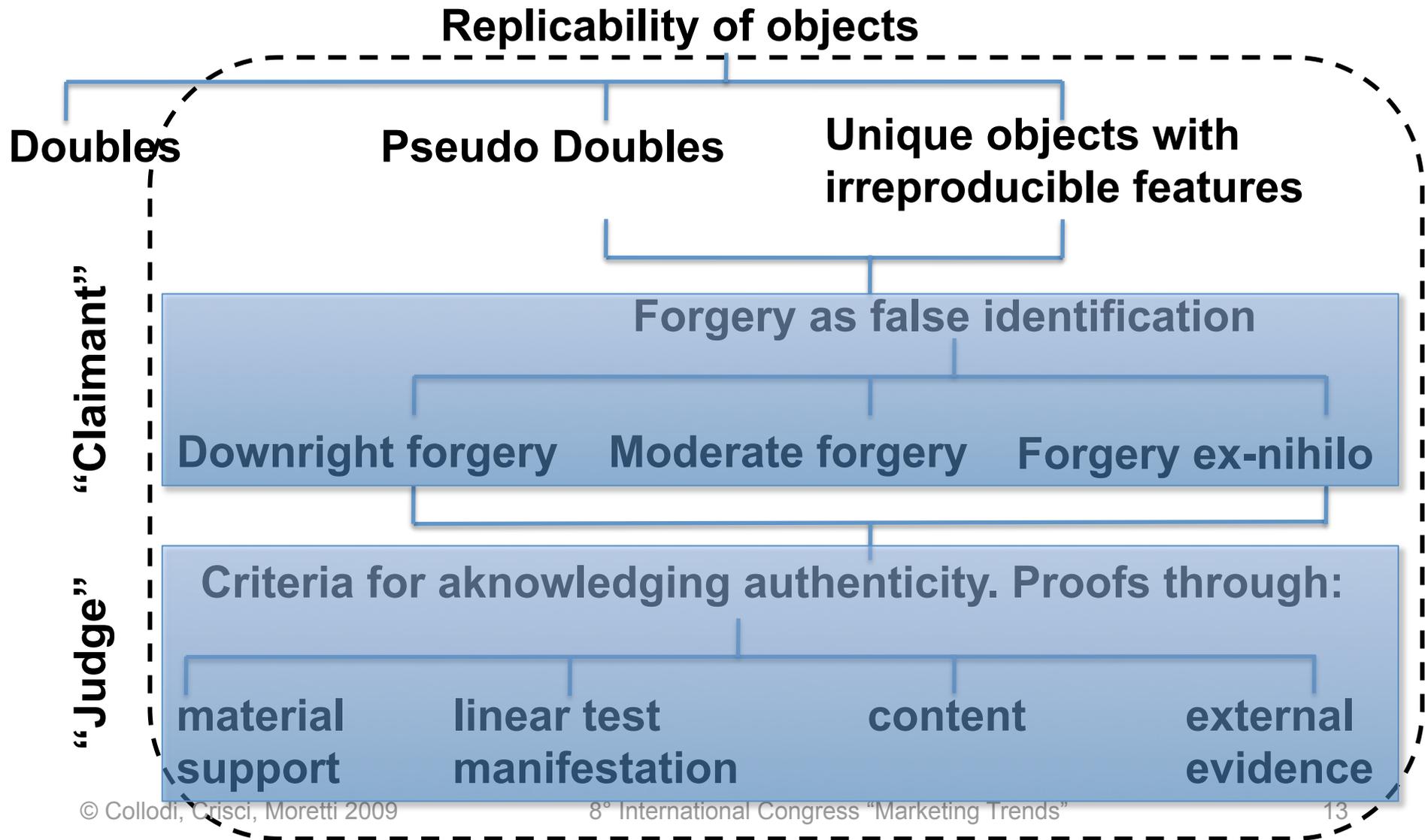


Theoretical foundations (2)

- **Forgery and False Identification:**
 - «The *necessary* conditions for a forgery are that, given the actual or supposed existence of an object O_a , made by A (be it a human author or whatever) under specific historical circumstances t_1 , there is a different object O_b , made by B (be it a human author or whatever) under circumstances t_2 , which under a certain description displays strong similarities to O_a (or with a traditional image of O_a)»;
 - «The *sufficient* condition for a forgery is that it be claimed by some *Claimant* that O_b is indiscernibly identical with O_a »
- **A topology of False Identification (table below)**



A semiotic framework to fakes





Cases of Replicability

- **Doubles:** «a physical *token* which possesses all the characteristics of another physical *token*, at least from a practical point of view, insofar as both possess all the essential attributes prescribed by an abstract *type*»:
 - two objects are considered to be *interchangeable*.
- **Pseudo Doubles:** «there are cases in which a single token of a type acquires for some users a particular value, for one or more of the following reasons»:
 - temporal priority; legal priority; evident association; alleged association; pseudo association.
- **Unique object with irreproducible features:** «there are objects so complex in material and form that no attempt to reproduce them can duplicate all the characteristics acknowledged as essential.
 - In such cases a unique object become *its own type*.



A pragmatics of False Identification (1)

- **Cases that we exclude from a topology of False Identification: pseudonymity; plagiarism; aberrant decoding (Eco 1976); historical forgery**
- **Downright Forgery: «Oa exists somewhere, that is the unique original object, and that Oa is not the same as Ob (in the *Claimant* point of view)»:**
 - **The Claimant know that Oa exists and knows – or presume to know – what Oa looks like;**
 - **Claimant’s addressees must share a more or less equivalent knowledge of Oa**
 - **Deliberate False Identification; Naïve False Identification; Authorial copies; Alteration of the original**



A pragmatics of False Identification (2)

- **Moderate Forgery:** «Oa exists, or existed in the past, and that the Claimant knows something about it. The addressees know that Oa exists, or existed, but do not necessarily have clear ideas about it. The Claimant knows that Oa and Ob are different but decides that in particular circumstances and for particular purposes they are of equal value»:
 - Confusional enthusiasm; Blatant claim of interchangeability
- **Forgery Ex-Nihilo:** «Oa does not exist – or, if according to uncertain report it existed in the past, it is by now irremediably lost. The Claimant claims – in good or bad faith – that Ob is identical with Oa. The Claimant falsely attributes Ob to a given author»:
 - Diplomatic Forgery; Deliberate Ex-Nihilo Forgery; False ascription in error



Agenda

- Research objectives (authenticity and consumption experiences: “is a fake a sign?”)
- Method (“authentication as a clear case of semiotic interpretation or of *abduction*”);
- Theoretical foundations (a semiotic framework to fakes: “the fake as a fake sign”);
- Results/Findings (a semiotic approach to fakes – objects, documents, work of art, experiences – shows us how theoretically weak are our criteria for deciding about authenticity);
- Discussion (a “powerful” analogy: consumption experiences as “drama and theatre” – together!)



Results/Findings (1): Fake&Forgery in Consumption Experiences

- «The crucial problem for a semiotics of fakes is not the one of a typology of the mistakes of the *Claimant*, but rather of a list of the criteria by which the *Judge* decides whether the *Claimant* is right or not»;
- The Judge can basically face two alternatives:
 - Downright Forgery. «The Judge has two further alternatives: (i) either succeed in putting Ob in front of Oa, thus showing that they are not indiscernibly identical; (ii) or compare the features of Ob with the celebrated and well-known features of Oa in order to show that the former cannot be mistaken for the latter».
 - Ex-Nihilo Forgery. «The Judge should prove or disprove that the Ob Ob is authentic. If Ob is authentic, then Ob is identical with the allegedly lost original Oa. However, the authenticity of something allegedly similar to a lost original Oa. However, the authenticity of something allegedly similar to a lost original can be demonstrated only by proving that Ob is the original»



Results/Findings (2): Fake&Forgery in Consumption Experiences

- Consumption Experiences as “Text” and Semiotics Proofs of “authentication”. Proofs through:
 - material support: «a document is a fake if its material support does not date back to the time of its alleged origin»;
 - linear text manifestation: «a document must be compared with everything know about the system of the form of the expression in a given period – as well as with what is known of the personal style of the alleged author»;
 - content: «for such proofs it is necessary to determine whether “the forms of the content” [...] are coherent with the semantic structure of the cultural milieu of the alleged authors»;
 - external evidences (referent): «a document is a fake if the external facts reported by it could not have been known at the time of its production».
- It is evident that none of the philological criteria listed above can help us in ascertaining the truth in our Story...!



Agenda

- **Research objectives (authenticity and consumption experiences: “is a fake a sign?”)**
- **Method (“authentication as a clear case of semiotic interpretation or of *abduction*”);**
- **Theoretical foundations (a semiotic framework to fakes: “the fake as a fake sign”);**
- **Results/Findings (a semiotic approach to fakes – objects, documents, work of art, experiences – shows us how theoretically weak are our criteria for deciding about authenticity);**
- **Discussion (a “powerful” analogy: consumption experiences as “drama and theatre” – together!)**



Discussion (1): consumption experience and authenticity

- In a managerial point of view, offerings and consumers could play the roles of “Author”, “Claimant” and “Judge” in different combinations
- Grayson, Martinec 2004 (experience as “text”):
 - Authenticity is a semiotic problem (“iconic and indexical cues contributes to assessments of authenticity”): if a sign is “something which stands to somebody for something in some respects or capacity,” then one should say that Ob stands to the Claimant for Oa;
 - but in forgery there is only an alleged identity: «Ob can have all the properties of Oa except that of being Oa itself and of standing at the same moment in the same place as Oa» (“is a fake a sign?”)
- Gilmore, Pine 1999, 2007 (experience as “theatre”)



Discussion (2): Gilmore & Pine's Authenticity Paradox

- «Fake, Fake, It's *All Fake*»: «Businesses can *render* their inauthentic offerings as authentic. Doing so requires embracing this essential paradox: all human enterprise is *ontologically* fake – that is, in its very being it is inauthentic – and yet, output from that enterprise can be *phenomenologically* real – that is, it is perceived as authentic by the individuals who buy it» (p. 89)
- Two standards of authenticity: 1. being true to your own self (Is the offering true to itself); 2. being who you say you are to others (Is the offering what it says it is?)

Axiom #1	If you <i>are</i> authentic, then you don't have to <i>say</i> you're authentic
Axiom #2	If you <i>say</i> you're authentic, then you'd better <i>be</i> authentic
Axiom #3	It's easier to <i>be</i> authentic, if you don't <i>say</i> you're authentic
Axiom #4	It's easier to <i>render</i> offering authentic, if you <i>acknowledge</i> they're inauthentic
Axiom #5	You don't have to <i>say</i> your offerings are inauthentic, if you <i>render</i> them authentic



Discussion (3): consumption experience as “drama and theatre”

- How many semiotics in the case of consumption experiences as theatre?
- Researcher in theatre and drama is faced with two quite dissimilar (intimately correlated) types of “textual” material: that produced *in* the theatre and that composed *for* the theatre
 - “Theatre”: the complex phenomena associated with the performer-audience transaction (with the production and communication of meaning in the performance itself and with the systems underlying it);
 - “Drama”: mode of fiction designed for stage representation and constructed according to particular (“dramatic”) conventions.



Concluding remark

- The “ontological-phenomenological” polarity introduced by Gilmore and Pine – «it all *is* fake (in being), but it can be so real (to me)» – is a naïve perspective of authenticity.
- In “Consumption Experience as Theatre” the Semiotics Proofs of “authentication” are selected and arranged according to a wide range of sign: it is not possible to talk of a single theatrical *message* based on two “simple” standards of authenticity



Thank you for the attention!

Andrea Moretti with Donata Collodi and Francesco Crisci

Department of Economics

University of Udine

mailto: moretti@uniud.it, donata.collodi@uniud.it, crisci@uniud.it